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#12

SAM KIETH • WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEBS

THE MAXX

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www.IDWPUBLISHING.com
IDW founded by Ted Adams, Alex Garner, Kris Oprisko, and Robbie Robbins

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"I KNOW WHAT YOU DID.

"SOMEHOW YOU TRICKED JULIE WINTERS INTO GOING AWAY.

"AND WITHOUT HER, THE OUTBACK, WHICH IS A MANIFESTATION OF HER UNCONSCIOUS, *DIED.*

"NOW THE SPIRIT OF THE MAXX ROAMS THIS *RUINED* LAND, WEEPING AND LOST.

"BECAUSE EVERYTHING IN THIS LAND IS DEAD.

?

"DEAD AND ROTTING.

"AND ON *THIS* PLANE, THE MAXX IS INCAPACITATED WITH *LONELINESS* AND *GRIEF*.

"HE'S CRAWLED INTO A HOLE TO MEDITATE ON HIS *IMPOTENCE*...

"AND *SELF-PITY*.

"CAUGHT UP IN FORCES HE CAN'T UNDERSTAND...

"HE BROODS ON *ANGER*...

"*RAGE*...

CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG

"AND *REVENGE.*"

JULIA

JULIA

JUUULLIA!

CHUNG

THAT'S A PRETTY COOL SUMMARY OF THE CURRENT **SITUATION**, KID. BUT HOW DO **YOU** KNOW ANY OF THAT? I THOUGHT ALL THAT EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL STUFF WAS SUPPOSED TO BE **SECRET**?

Aww, PRETTY MUCH THAT'S WHAT WE GOSSIP ABOUT IN SCHOOL ALL DAY, THE METAPHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE, AS MANIFESTED THROUGH THE METAPHOR OF ***SUPER-HEROIC STRUGGLE.***

I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE WE'RE REALLY GONNA *USE* GEOGRAPHY OR MATH.

THAT'S WHY I CAME TO *FIND* YOU TONIGHT. I THINK YOU'RE THE SORCERER MR. GONE.

MY NAME IS HARRY. AND I WANT TO BE *POWERFUL* AND *STRONG.*

LIKE YOU. EVERYBODY IN SCHOOL KNOWS HOW YOU *BEAT* MAXX.

HOW YOU PUSHED SOME KID'S HAND THROUGH A BRICK WALL AND INTO ANOTHER DIMENSION.

HOW YOU'RE *DEPLETING* THE RAIN FOREST!

HOW YOU UNDERMINED THE PRESIDENT'S *HEALTH CARE POLICY...*

HOW YOU MADE NEWT GINGRICH LOOK *MEAN* AND DAN QUAYLE SEEM LIKE A FOOL.

IT'S LIKE, AT EVERY JUNCTURE OF HISTORY, WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE PEOPLE ARE ABOUT TO CLEAN UP THEIR ACT, BECOME WISER, MORE *HUMANE*, MORE IN TOUCH WITH THEIR *TRUE NATURES*, YOU'RE THERE TO *PUSH* THEM BACK IN THE *SLIME*.

I MEAN, *TOO COOL! NOBODY CAN HURT YOU!*

SO, HOW DO YOU GET POWER? WELL...

I GUESS THE EASIEST WAY IS THROUGH **KNOWLEDGE** ...MOSTLY SELF-KNOWLEDGE. KNOW YOUR **WEAKNESSES** AND THE WEAKNESSES OF OTH...

HUH? THAT *SUCKS!* I DON'T HAVE *TIME* FOR THAT CRAP!

BESIDES, I DON'T *HAVE* ANY WEAKNESSES.

REALLY? WELL, ME, MAXX, JULIE, AND EVERYONE **ELSE** ON THE GLOBE **DOES** HAVE THEM. EVERYONE EXCEPT FOR YOU, OF COURSE... AND THAT IS SOMETHING YOU CAN EXPLOIT.

I DON'T THINK YOU *ARE* MR. GONE! WHY DON'T YOU GIVE ME SOMETHING I CAN *USE*, SOMETHING THAT'LL MAKE ME *POWERFUL* AND *FEARED* RIGHT *NOW*?

LOOK, KID, THE MOST RELIABLE FORM OF POWER I KNOW IS HAVING **POWERFUL FRIENDS**-- JUDGES, SENATORS, LIKE THAT. ONCE YOU'RE A PART OF A SOCIO-POLITICAL **ELITE**, YOU CAN DO **ANYTHING**! THERE'S NO **GREATER** POWER THAN SETTING THE **PRIME INTEREST RATE**!

YEAH, BUT I'M IN JUNIOR *HIGH!* BUILDING A POWER BASE LIKE THAT WILL TAKE AT LEAST TILL I'M *TWENTY*. I WANT POWER *NOW!*

THEN WE'RE TALKING **CRIME**! I RECOMMEND **WHITE COLLAR CRIME**!

IT'S SAFE, IT'S HIGHLY PROFITABLE, AND IF YOU STEAL BIG ENOUGH, LIKE **LOOTING** A SAVINGS AND LOAN, OR STARTING A **CREDIT CARD** COMPANY, FOLKS WON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE IT AS A **CRIME**!

BUT I DON'T KNOW *HOW* TO LOOT A SAVINGS AND LOAN!

THEN WE HAVE TO GO FOR **STREET CRIME**. BUY A **GUN**.

A GUN WILL GIVE YOU A **LOT** OF POWER OVER ANYBODY THAT **DOESN'T** HAVE A GUN. UNFORTUNATELY, YOU'RE **NOT** THE FIRST PERSON TO THINK OF THIS.

WITH HALF THE POPULATION **PACKING**, WE MAY HAVE TO ESCALATE. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT **BAZOOKAS?**

WHY DON'T YOU JUST GIMME WHAT *YOU'RE* WEARING?

IT'S OBVIOUSLY A MAGNETIC *AURA* BOOSTER, FOR PROJECTING YOUR *THOUGHT WAVES* ONTO PEOPLE AND GETTING CONTROL OF THEIR EMOTIONS.

SNIFF SNIFF

WHAT'S THAT FUNNY *SMELL?*

THIS THING? IT'S A **NECK BRACE.** IT'S SUPPOSED TO KEEP MY **HEAD** IN LINE WITH MY **SPINE.**

IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE IT'S WORKING.

S'NOT.

IGNORE THE AROMA. CREATURES OF GREAT MAJESTY AND POWER SOMETIMES **SMELL.**

CLINK!

I DON'T THINK YOU CAN DO ANYTHING!

THERE'S NO NEED TO GET NASTY.

IT'S *TRUE!* MAXX IS SUPPOSED TO BE THIS BIG *SUPERHERO,* RIGHT? ONE DAY KENT AN' ME WERE TALKING TO THIS OLD BUM AND THIS JUNKIE JUMPED US.

DID MAXX SAVE US? NOOOOO. THE OLD *BUM* SAVED US. WHAT GOOD IS A *HERO* IF HE'S NOT GONNA BE AROUND *EVERY TIME* YOU NEED HELP?

YOU'RE JUST LIKE *MAXX!*

THAT'S WHEN I REALIZED, IF I'M GONNA KEEP KENT SAFE, I'M GONNA HAVE TO BE *POWERFUL* MYSELF...EVEN IF I HAVE TO BE A *VILLAIN!*

JILL

I met this guy in a donut shop just outside of Butte, Montana.

He said he was Jack... something. A freelance forensic pathologist.

We laughed about that... Jack and Jill, you know.

THE DONUT HOLE "IT'S THE QUALITY"

ORDER HERE

MOTEL

I let him pick me up and take me to a cheesy motel.

The sex.

'Cause it WAS good.

The sex, I mean.

The sleaziness made it better somehow.

It was the kind of sex where your body seeps heat and your scalp sweats and you cry out the name of a STUFFED ANIMAL.

PIZZA

Afterwards, when we woke up, Jack seemed different somehow... less playful.

Worried.

Tense.

Of course, it WAS then he realized I took his car.

Yeah. That was probably it.

NOW, REMEMBER. IF I PROVE MY POWER, YOU'LL GO TO THE BULLDOG JAR RUBBER FACTORY, GET THE BOX OF TAPES THERE, AND TAKE THEM TO SARAH JAMES? YOU DO KNOW HER, RIGHT?

YEAH, YEAH. JUST DO IT.

WATCH CAREFULLY. I CAN ONLY DO THIS ONCE.

PTK

rrrrrrrrrrr

DON'T WORRY, SARAH. DADDY'S COMING.

rrrrrrrrrr

WOW!

RIGHT UP TO THE POINT WHEN THE MARBLE HIT HIM ON THE HEAD, MAXX THOUGHT HE WAS TRYING TO BREAK OUT...

OUT OF THE DYING OUTBACK...

AWAY FROM HIS PAINFUL MEMORIES OF JULIE, THE JUNGLE QUEEN.

BONK!

BUT THEN HE REMEMBERED...

HE WAS ACTUALLY TRYING TO BREAK IN...!

IN THROUGH THE ROTTING CONCRETE...

THROUGH THE BURSTING WATER MAINS...

INTO THE OL'...

BULL-DOG-JAR-RUBBER-FACE!

THIS SIDE UP

HEADQUARTERS (WITH ATTACHED APARTMENT AND WALK-IN KITCHEN) TO MR GONE, DEMON PRINCE OF EVIL!

HUH. TAPES...

SO, YOU SEE, SARAH... I HAD TO GIVE THAT PURPLE MUD-PUPPY A REAL VILLAIN TO FIGHT OR HIS LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN MEANINGLESS. SO I CREATED THIS MR. GON--

SKIT

ZRZT

KRAAK

DO YOU THINK THESE WIRE-RIMS AND THE STRAIGHTER HAIR MAKE ME LOOK *MORE* LIKE *JULIE*, MAXX?

OR IS IT JUST *TOTALLY* A LOST CAUSE?

SHOOT.

AND THERE'S *NO POINT* LURKING OUTSIDE, MAXX. IT'S NOT LIKE I DON'T KNOW YOU'RE THERE.

THE STAND

HERE.

THEY'RE FROM YOUR FATHER. I DECIDED NOT TO BURN THEM ALL.

MY *FATHER*? MR. GONE?!

WAIT, MAXX. I DON'T WANT THESE, MAXX...!

AARGGHGH!

SOMEBODY'S GONNA SUFFER FOR THIS!

SO HERE'S HARRY, WALKING THROUGH THE RAIN, WISHING HE HAD POWER...

STOOPID TAPES WEREN'T THERE. GONE'S GONNA KILL ME...

HARRY!

EVERYBODY AT SCHOOL SAYS YOU'RE MR. GONE'S IDIOT ASSISTANT.

WHAT IF I AM? THAT'S MY BUSINESS!

DON'T HANG WITH GONE!

HE'S TRYING TO FENCE ME IN! TALKING TO MY FRIENDS... SENDING ME TAPES...!

I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU SAY, SARAH! HE'S MY FRIEND AND HE'S TEACHING ME HOW TO RULE THE WORLD! I DON'T CARE WHAT HE DOES TO ME AFTER THAT!

BUT IT'S NOT YOU HE WANTS.

SO AFTER I...um...GAVE HER THE TAPES, SHE SAID YOU WERE JUST TRYING TO *USE* ME TO, Y'KNOW, GET TO *HER.*

THAT YOU WEREN'T GONNA GIVE ME ANY *SECRETS* TO *POWER* AT ALL!

HEH HEH. PRETTY FUNNY, HUH?

OH, SOMEBODY BROKE INTO YOUR PLACE, BY THE WAY.

VANDALS! A MAN TRIES TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT. BUYS A LITTLE LAND. SETS UP A **SECRET HUMAN V!V!-SECTION** AND **TORTURE** LABORATORY AND **WHAT** HAPPENS? SOMEBODY **TRASHES** IT!

RUSH IS RIGHT! THERE'S NO **RESPECT** FOR **PRIVATE PROPERTY!**

UH, SURE. BUT ABOUT WHAT SHE SAID. YOU REALLY *ARE* GONNA...

RATS. I'M **TEMPORARILY PARALYZED** AGAIN! I **HATE** IT WHEN THAT HAPPENS!

HARRY, BE A GOOD KID AND PULL ME OUT OF THE SUN BEFORE I **REALLY** STINK!

THUMP!

SURE, BUT...

YOU *AREN'T* JUST USING ME...

RIGHT?

OF COURSE I'M **USING** YOU! EVERYBODY USES **EVERYBODY!** WHAT PLANET DO YOU THINK YOU'RE ON?

I DON'T HAVE ANY **FRIGGIN'** POWER SECRETS! YOU **FELL** FOR THAT? I JUST KNOW WHERE A COUPLE OF THE DIMENSIONAL PORTALS ARE. I MAKE UP THE REST! ONLY AN **IDIOT** WOULD THINK I'VE GOT **REAL** SUPER-POWERS!

NOW GROW UP AND **DRAG** ME OUT OF THE **DAMN SUN...!**

MY ONE FLAW AS AN ARCH-FIEND WAS ALWAYS AN EXCESS OF CANDOR.

SPLAT!

OUCH.

THE REALLY SAD THING IS THAT DIDN'T KILL ME. IT JUST REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY HURT.

HI, HARRY. SARAH SAID YOU MIGHT BE IN TROUBLE.

ANYTHING BAD HAPPENING UP HERE?

NO, MAXX. THERE'S NOTHING UP HERE AT ALL.

I STOLE SOME MORE *FOOD* FOR YOU, JASPER.

THANKS, LINC. AND THANKS FOR NOT TELLING. IF DAD FOUND OUT, HE'D WUP ME *GOOD.*

JEEZ, IT'S BEEN *THREE WEEKS.* I'D GIVE *ANYTHING* NOT TO HAVE MY *HAND* STUCK IN THIS STUPID DIMENSIONAL PORTAL THING.

ANYTHING? EVEN YOUR *NEW BIKE* WITH THE GLOW-IN-THE-DARK HANDLEBARS?

SURE. WHY?

AAAA